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bourdieu-in-the-making: *on the state* and the craft of reflexive sociology

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*On the State** is the latest of Pierre Bourdieu's posthumous publications to appear in English, following the release in January 2012 of the original French version, *Sur l'État*, in conjunction with a series of public colloquia marking the 10th anniversary of his passing. The volume is composed of the twenty-three lectures Bourdieu gave at the Collège de France over academic years 1989-90, 1990-91, and 1991-92, and presents his first explicit and extensive engagement with the classical problem of 'the state' – a term he had very consciously avoided for over two decades. Using 'a mixture of manuscript notes, extracts from special presentations and marginal notes on books and photocopies', editors Champagne, Lenoir, Poupeau, and Rivière succeeded in turning this 'lattice of written texts, oral commentaries and more or less improvised reflections' (p. xi) into a dynamic collection of essays that offers the reader a unique insight into Bourdieu's thought *and* practice. Indeed this book is not simply about a classical object of political theory. It is equally about sociological thinking and doing, and their intimate relation to the political.

THINKING THE STATE: SOCIAL OBSTACLES AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

Bourdieu's reflexive epistemology explicitly informs his approach to what he admits is the most challenging social object he has ever had to confront. Faithful to the Bachelardian posture he contributed to developing throughout his career, Bourdieu inaugurates his lectures with a methodical reflection on the prenotions and other epistemological obstacles that hinder the researcher's objective understanding of the state as a social reality. The greatest challenge to sociological inquiry is the fact that the social world produces and legitimates not only its objects but also the very categories and instruments we use to perceive and understand them. The epistemological vigilance that should therefore systematically guide any sociological investigation is even more necessary when addressing 'the state', which is 'that which founds the logical conformity and moral conformity of the social world, and in this way, the fundamental consensus on the meaning of the social world' (p. 4). As a consequence of this, 'our thinking, the very structures of consciousness by which we construct the social world and the particular object that is the state, are very likely the product of the state itself' (p. 3).

* Pierre Bourdieu (2014) *On the State. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989-1992*. Edited by Patrick Champagne, Remi Lenoir, Franck Poupeau, Marie-Christine Rivière. Translated by David Fernbach. Cambridge: Polity Press.

What makes the state especially difficult to grasp objectively, that is, to 'conquer' as a properly *sociological* object, is that it is a successful fiction: a 'well-founded illusion' (p. 12) (as Durkheim had described religion), which, like all social institutions, exists 'in things and in minds' (p. 115), that is, both objectively through its material manifestations and subjectively in individual and collective mental structures and representations. For Bourdieu the latter dimension is crucial to understand the nature of the state and its cognitive effects: the Weberian definition of the state that exclusively singles out its successful 'monopoly of legitimate physical violence' is incomplete, insofar as that monopoly is accompanied, and even conditioned, by the state's successful monopoly of legitimate *symbolic* violence (p. 4). Sociologists therefore need to operate an epistemological break with the cognitive categories of social representation that the state imposes through its symbolic power – and this *de facto* puts them in competition with the state's authority to impose the categories through which social reality is constructed (more on this later).

A great part of *On the State* is dedicated to explaining and addressing the many conceptual and practical aspects of this epistemological problem, and this is a very important, didactic dimension of the book. Indeed one of the unfortunate consequences of the incorporation of Bourdieu's sociology into the curricular canon is a distortive tendency to focus disproportionately on his theoretical contributions and conclusions at the expense of his empirical investigations and methodology, and of a proper appreciation of how theory and empirics are articulated in his work. The great value of *On the State* is that it puts centre-stage Bourdieu's *modus operandi*, wherein his detailed empirical inquiries and his reflexive epistemological concerns are constantly brought to bear on each other and on his conceptual framework and theoretical analyses. In this instance, Bourdieu deploys and simultaneously theorizes a range of epistemic and methodological strategies whose purpose is to allow an objectivation of the state that is independent of the categories of understanding and of judgment that the state imposes through its physical and symbolic power.

The most basic step of this process is to emancipate our thought from the subjectivation of the state, which is the product of the successful (i.e. performative) acts of jurists and legal theoreticians who have gradually brought the state into existence as a legal fiction, a *juridical subject* (p. 55). This fiction is successful in that it is accepted by both public and scholarly thought and discourse, which thereby perpetuate it *doxically*, that is, through a form of collective belief that, unlike religious belief, operates below the level of conscious 'recognition' (*reconnaissance*) and is hence 'misrecognized' as such.

This delineates important methodological paths for a sociology of the state. The first obvious move that follows from the de-reification of the state's fictional subject-status is to start conceptualising and studying the state properly as 'a [social] field', that is, as 'a space structured according to oppositions linked to specific forms of capital with differing interests' (p. 20). These oppositions result from 'the division of organizational functions associated with the different respective bodies' that constitute it, such as the ministries and other institutions of the bureaucratic field, each of which has its own specific history and specific professional interests bound up with specific social positions. As long as one speaks of 'the state' as a single agent, as the instrument of the hegemony of a single social group, or as the site of a pre-defined social struggle (e.g. class

struggle), it is impossible to understand where the state comes from, what it does, and how it operates.

Bourdieu's first lecture is partly dedicated to explaining how he 'encountered the state' *indirectly* while investigating the single-house market and the shift of national housing policies in France (a study published as *The Social Structures of the Economy*), which led him to focus on the ordinary functioning of the bureaucratic field, such as the establishment and operations of a state housing commission. The lessons from a 'tangential' focus on such trivial and mundane components of 'the state' is then critically assessed and developed into a systematic methodological procedure that is meant to avoid the pitfalls of grand philosophical theorizing that typically succumbs to the 'theory effects' of successful social constructions.

The centrality of the state's *symbolic* dimension, on the other hand, calls for a focus on the fundamental categories of perception and classification that make the social order possible and that simultaneously order and regulate individual and collective thinking, being, and doing within it. In a direct filiation with the French sociological tradition of Durkheim, Mauss, and Halbwachs, Bourdieu highlights the importance of investigating the social origins and structures (*les cadres sociaux*) of such general, taken-for-granted ideational categories and frameworks. In the specific case of a sociology of the state, this entails studying, among others, the relation between private and public time ('I don't know any anarchist who does not change his clock when we go over to summer time' (p. 8)); how collective memory, perceptions, and behaviour are 'ruled' (*réglés*) through state-imposed calendars, school schedules, commemorations, and rituals; and of course the structures of spatial organisation that are (re)produced through the teaching of *national* geography.

To understand the state, then, is to understand how this successful, fictional subject has come to impose itself in our deepest mental categories as the author and guarantor of the universal and the public against the particular, the private, and the domestic. Or, to put it differently, the 'puzzle' facing the sociologist is not why people might decide to disobey or oppose the state – such a problematization succumbs to a 'doxic experience of the social world' by assuming the state to be socially and sociologically 'evident'. The puzzle, rather, is why they do obey it in the first place. *Contra* philosophical and normative discussions of the 'public space' that ignore its history and the conditions of its possibility and legitimacy (e.g. Habermas's), Bourdieu's core methodological strategy, following Norbert Elias, is the *sociogenetic* approach, which is not a (Foucauldian) *genealogy* and does not aim to produce a theory of the (birth of the) state but rather a 'model of the logic of its genesis' (p. 191). This he pursues according to what he calls *genetic structuralism*, which 'has to establish the specific logic of the genesis of bureaucratic logic, and simultaneously to describe the specific nature of this logic' (see pp. 86-93).

Genetic structuralism is, then, Bourdieu's response to the dual epistemological challenge posed by the successful social construction of the state both as a *non-problem* – the result of a collective amnesia regarding its genesis and contentious origins – and as an *efficient illusion* – the result of a collective misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) of its fictional nature and symbolic power. Departing from Durkheim's rationale according to which an understanding of social structures requires a return to 'the elementary' (which

Durkheim sought in 'the primitive' through anthropological inquiry), Bourdieu's genetic approach rather aims at capturing '*l'originnaire*': 'the original' not in the sense of the unique, but of that which pertains to the origins: 'the original is the place where a certain number of things are formed, things that, once formed, pass unnoticed. The original is the site of the essential, the site where struggles are visible, since resistances to the constitution of the state were very important' (p. 89).

Conceptually and methodologically, genetic structuralism is also meant to avoid the problem faced by comparative history/sociology, namely, that of inducing (and assuming) common characteristics among all historical states (p. 38). How then, to study the history of the state without falling into any faulty universalist or reductionist assumptions? Bourdieu asserts that '[i]t is possible to study a particular case – or a small number of particular cases – in such a way that your project is to grasp the universal forms of state in it, the logic of the genesis of a logic' (pp. 86-7). For this reason, 'it seems to [him] doubly justified to take as the central object the cases of France and England [while constantly comparing them to others, especially Japan], treated explicitly as particular cases of a universe of possible cases, as privileged particular cases, because historically, what was invented [t]here served as a model for all other forms of the modern state.' (p. 87). The corollary of the historical status as modern 'models' that France and England enjoy is that their own genesis is autonomous from that of others. In other words, they are not taken to be universally representative of the genesis of all states, but rather so distinctively delineated socio-historically that a structurogenetic approach can produce important insights as to the logic of their constitutive logic.

SOCIOGENESIS OF THE STATE: THE UNIVERSAL AND THE MONOPOLY OF ITS MONOPOLY

According to Bourdieu, the logic of the emergence of the modern European state is that of the *accumulation*, *concentration*, and *transmutation* of different kinds of capital – 'economic, physical force, symbolic, cultural or informational' (p. 186) – through a dual process of *monopolization* and *universalization*. This process whereby private capital is accumulated, centralized, and transformed into public capital simultaneously generates a kind of 'meta-capital' and thereby gradually establishes the state as a 'meta-field' of the 'field of power'. The latter had already been defined by Bourdieu as the field wherein the exchange rate between different species of capital is the object of a constant social struggle among capital holders, but now Bourdieu specifies the relationship between it and the state – '[o]ne of the unifying principles of the field of power is that those people who belong to it struggle for power over the state, for this capital that gives power over the preservation and reproduction of the different species of capital' (198; see also p. 311). The Lecture of 21 February 1991 sketches the basic steps of Bourdieu's analysis of the genesis of the modern state (pp.190-195) and its transformation into this 'power over powers', that he covers extensively in the following lectures:

1) The formula 'concentration = universalization + monopolization' reflects the dual process at work in the accumulation of capital in the hands of what gradually becomes the state: on the one hand, the recognition of the

legitimacy of the different species of capital (and hence of the autonomy of their specific, differentiated social fields: the economy, the law, culture...) and on the other, the dispossession of capital holders of their respective monopolies. Bourdieu thus demonstrates that the success of the constitution of the state's monopoly (of physical violence, taxation, etc.) requires its prior successful accumulation of *symbolic capital*, without which it lacks the 'legitimacy' (Weber) that makes its 'racketing' (Tilly) acceptable to those it has deprived of their privileges and all the others now subjected to its authority. As a 'meta-field', then, the state recognizes, unifies, and dispossesses – domination entails social integration, not exclusion.

2) To bring forth the logic of the dynastic state ('the original') Bourdieu introduces the notion of 'a system of strategies of [social] reproduction' (235-244) which he had previously analysed in relation to Bearn peasantry and state nobility in France, the concept of 'strategy' being understood in a habitus-mediated, not rational-choice-theoretical sense. The dynastic state is a state in which these combined reproduction strategies (of fertility, succession, economic and social investment, education, or myth-making) 'are the essential part of what this power does' (242), specifically because '[t]he state is merged with the king's house' and 'political business is not separated from the domestic unit' (245, 244).

Through this prism, the well-known history of the European dynastic state is illuminated anew by a combined anthropological-sociological reading, which brings forth the interconnectedness of two opposite logics. On the one hand, dynastic state-practice leads to specific normative inventions (e.g. apanages, Salic law) that follow a properly 'practical logic' governed by the system of patrimonial reproduction strategies. On the other, dynastic strategies and inventions are theorized by legislators and jurists, who have an interest in such a rationalization that legitimates their own existence and social role. It is in this process of transformation of a *practical logic* into a *normative logic* that the private dynastic state is gradually replaced by the impersonal modern state.

3) This move 'from the king's house to *raison d'état*' is born of two contradictions that are intrinsic to the dynastic state. The first is that 'the king expropriates private powers for the benefit of a private power', and this can only be justified/legitimated if this expropriation is universalized beyond the person and case of the king. However, by universalizing the king's particular case, jurists in effect 'contribute to developing a discourse that is the very negation of what they legitimize, that is, that if it is necessary to de-privatize the private in order to legitimize it, this is because the non-private is better than the private' (259). The second contradiction is the gradual coexistence of two antagonistic modes of social reproduction, namely, the domestic reproduction of the dynastic heirs on the basis of the family, blood, and nature, and the reproduction of state officials on the basis of the school system, merit, and competence.

The opposition between heirs and clerks establishes a tripartite structure wherein the king uses clerks and heirs against each other and rules through, and above, their opposition. A division of the labour of social domination thereby develops that is grounded in the struggle between two different principles of autonomous authority, wherein the powerlessness of the reproducible is balanced by the non-reproducibility of the powerful (p. 261). It is, according to

Bourdieu, the contradiction between these two categories of agents that gradually erodes the domestic logic of the dynastic state and promotes the development of the bureaucratic state, through the increasing concentration of cultural and symbolic capital in the hands of the rising clerks, whose very gradually accumulated victories establish the distinction between public and private order. This process is accompanied by a series of interrelated transformations: the territory is unified, the different social fields are integrated and their rules codified (e.g. legal codes, orthography), the exercise of state power is depersonalized, and its procedures homogenized and rationalized (e.g. use of surveys, forms, and statistics).

The modern state, then, is largely the product of those who, because of their specific capital and mode of reproduction, their professional habitus and social interests, created 'the public' and 'the universal', and produced an autonomous bureaucratic field that simultaneously produced them – these are the samurais in Japan, the nobles of the robe (jurists) in France. This analysis enables Bourdieu to address the relation between the two ordinary conceptions of the state, namely, the state as a group of people sharing a common identity over a unified territory and subject(ed) to the same sovereignty, and the state as the sovereign administration of this people on/and that territory. State-mediated thinking about the state, not least within democratic societies, is especially visible in the common perception that the former produces (and thereby justifies) the latter (pp. 32 and 196-197). The sociogenetic approach rather shows that it is not the existence of a naturally distinctive group sharing so-called objective characteristics (a 'nation') that called for the development of an appropriate, impersonal apparatus of government to administer them sovereignly, but 'the constitution of bureaucratic instances that are autonomous in relation to family, religion and economy that [was] the condition for the appearance of what is called the nation-state' (p. 37). An important part of Bourdieu's remaining lectures aims to further elaborate on the different aspects of this process, including the role of the school system in both the reproduction of bureaucrats and state-thinking, but also in the production of nationalism.

SOCIOLOGY AND THE STATE: A STRUCTURAL RELATION

Collège de France lectures provide a perfect setting to showcase the innovativeness of thinkers like Bourdieu, and this volume is filled with important commentaries, reflections, and hypotheses on both social reality and social science that are impossible to cover in this review. Of particular importance to readers interested in the philosophy and sociology of social science are Bourdieu's comments on the socially maintained hierarchical relation between theory and empirics (pp. 23-24); the socially imposed frontiers among history, sociology, and anthropology (pp. 86-88), or their dysfunctional relation to epistemology (pp. 90-91) and philosophy (pp. 96, 340-341). More central to the object of this volume, however, are Bourdieu's reflections on the relation of the social and historical sciences and humanities to the state itself. These can be organized into three main points.

The first is that state nobility and jurists are not the only social groups that contribute to (re)producing the state by theorizing it. Intellectuals and

scholars play an important role in this process, especially political philosophers (pp. 269, 338), historians, and social scientists. Of special contemporary significance is the fact that the social sciences, and sociology especially, 'have played a very important role in the construction of the state of mind and philosophy that led to the welfare state' insofar as they were 'built up against [the] philosophy of individualism' and 'connected with [its] dissolution' (pp. 363, 364). More generally, socio-political thought/theory is generated in political action and work, not independently of it. It should therefore be understood not as the theorization of a pre-existing reality, but as the ideational manifestation of practical positions within and about it – in other words, it is co-constitutive of reality, and reflexive, critical sociology aims to bring to consciousness the erasure of this move from the logic of practice to the logic of logic.

The second point has to do with the homology between the state and sociology. Much like sociology, the state is 'a theoretical unifier, a theorist'; it involves 'a rational knowledge of the social world' and all its 'techniques of objectivation', of which statistics is the instrument par excellence (pp. 203, 213-214). Insofar as it deals with social facts and humans 'as things', the state is in effect 'Durkheimian *avant la lettre*'. But this homology between sociology and the state also places them in a competition with each other: sociology 'makes a demonic claim quite analogous to that of the state, that of constructing the true view of the social world, more true than the official one... [It] thereby finds itself in the position of meta-state' by 'appropriating the monopoly of the construction of legitimate representation of the social world' (p. 39). The sociologist, in other words, is the '*meta-meta*' (p. 54).

But this meta-position is simultaneously one of subjection and dependence, both materially and symbolically, vis-à-vis the state. Bourdieu has elsewhere described intellectuals as the dominated portion of the dominant class. Here, he highlights the ambivalence of a critical sociology carried out from within the institutions of the state and through the legitimating diplomas and legitimated social and symbolic status that the state confers on social scientists. A sociological lecture delivered from a Collège de France lectern is both a state-enabled and (potentially) state-defying act. It is in the interstices of this structural space simultaneously shaping the nature and potential of the social sciences that a reflexive sociology might aspire to turn its subversive ambitions into something more than the mere appropriation of a social monopoly. Bourdieu's own socio-intellectual trajectory can be viewed as an attempt to embody this vocation and address its associated dilemmas.

SOCIOLOGY-IN-THE-MAKING: A TRIBUTE

A final word on the editorial work that was invested in this book is in order. Posthumous texts are peculiar and there are often legitimate reasons to be ambivalent about them. Alongside the curiosity or eagerness to discover them there is doubt as to their textual integrity and authorial legitimacy, especially when the author has not directly been involved in their preparation. With the exception of one chapter that Bourdieu personally proofread, *On the State* is explicitly a case wherein such concerns are highly exacerbated and reasonably

justified, the editors having consciously violated his principle of the separation of the written and spoken word, two different categories of discourse governed by different social conditions and rules of enunciation, transmission, and interpretation.

Instead of editing the texts down, by removing the repetitions, digressions, and corrections that inevitably characterise the processes of research and oral pedagogical transmission; instead of offering the reader a depurated version of Bourdieu's propositions that would reflect the cautiousness that had characterised his own editorial practice, the editors adopted the opposite strategy, namely, to present the reader with all the available material, painstakingly edited, organised, and complemented with the relevant references needed to guide us through Bourdieu's spiralling but no less conclusive explorations – with all the natural overlaps, parentheses, doubts, imprecisions, awkwardness, gaps, and Freudian slips that these entail. The final product is a volume Bourdieu would certainly not have published, and is probably very different from the *book* he would have written.

As a result of these bold editorial choices and of the tremendous work and dedication their implementation has required, *On the State* is a surprising gift, a reverence, and an act of love. It is difficult to imagine a text – not least one of such dense and consequential intellectual substance – that could better manifest and illustrate the 'spirit' and ethos of Pierre Bourdieu – his personality, his thought, his practice, and his very awareness of how they operated in the cognitive and social processes of sociological exploration and public communication. Because it showcases Bourdieusian epistemology in practice and in action so to speak, *On the State* is a beautiful, intelligent tribute to Bourdieu. Simultaneously, by allowing the full (theoretical *and* praxical) expression of Bourdieu's reflexive science-in-the-making, the editors have also mediated Bourdieu's own tribute to sociology – the underdog, the non-glamorous, lowly science, the science of the everyday humble and mundane, here deployed, in all its earthly self-consciousness, on the jealously guarded turf of political philosophers.

The slated publication of Bourdieu's remaining Collège de France lectures, of which the lectures on Manet have already appeared in French, promises to further illustrate the critical, reflexive, and socially subversive insights such a sociology can offer to illuminate the many complex dimensions and dilemmas of our social and scholarly condition.
